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MYTH, RITUAL, COMMUNITY:
ISSUES OF INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION
WITHIN THE FAMILY

by
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B.A., Allegheny College, 1976

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for the degree of
Master of Arts

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1978

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FOREWARD

An academic schism has long existed between the philosopher/theologian and the social scientist. The philosopher often neglects to apply his/her abstract thinking to relevant, current problems in human life, while the social scientist frequently shuns the meditative explorations of the philosopher, severely limiting his/her sources of input concerning human behavior and human problems.

A vital asset of the field known as Interpersonal Communication is its potential to utilize both the philosopher's contemplation and the social scientist's practical research and concrete application of ideas. The student of Interpersonal Communication possesses the rare opportunity to be a true humanist, in that he/she can incorporate knowledge from the humanities, areas of abstract thought, into his/her active concern with the study and welfare of human beings.

The idea of "Community" has attracted the interest of students of religious studies and philosophy, as have the concepts of "Myth" and "Ritual", and few writers have related any of these concepts to interpersonal relationships. Similarly, few communication authorities have dealt with these issues at all. I have written this paper because I perceive a need to acknowledge the importance of community in interpersonal relationships and the impact of myth and ritual upon community, and I have written it also in an effort to encourage the student of Interpersonal Communication

to embrace both the pragmatic, concrete developments around him or her and the less tangible, very important aspects of creative meditation.

I have written this paper for several potential audiences. Students of Philosophy or Religious Studies may benefit from seeing the objects of their study applied to current, real human situations. Students of Interpersonal Communication may learn both to see the applicability of these concepts to relevant situations and to apply these concepts toward bettering individual circumstances. The "helper" in the helping relationship, be he/she a counselor, psychologist, clergyperson or friend, might also find the paper relevant, although the major emphasis is on describing community, myth and ritual in the family, and not on how to most effectively use this knowledge to improve relationships. I have focused on the family for the purpose of simplification, and the ideas set forth in this paper can apply to any significant interpersonal relationship.

INTRODUCTION

Loretta lived in a large house in a fashionable area of town. Her husband was a successful businessman and her three children were attractive and intelligent. Loretta actively participated in a number of neighborhood social organizations including the P.T.A. and a prominent church group. A maid cleaned the house, but Loretta took care of the meals and the children herself. We, who were friends of the children, all thought Loretta was pleased with her behavior, her social standing and the academic achievements of her children. She seemed to pride herself on the family image.

None of us noticed any change in Loretta when the children were almost grown, and it came as a complete shock to most of us when she suddenly took off for parts unknown with a friend. "That doesn't sound like Loretta" we all said, "She has everything here, and besides, she's very conservative and set in her ways. She will come back."

Loretta did come back...briefly. She left again after telling her family that she was tired of being only the good wife and mother, tired of arguments centered around whether or not she had dinner on the table promptly at 6:00. She was tired of living with a man who saw her only in terms of the roles which she filled so well.

Katie, a friend of mine, spent her last years of high school, looking forward to the day when she would go off to college. She felt estranged from her family, felt that her part in the family consisted of being obedient, helpful and "loving." "Loving" meant always acting cheerful and insisting upon helping others with their chores. Katie told me she felt her family ran smoothly only when everyone acted "loving." She felt she could not be honest about her feelings and was required to "play games," and therefore felt she did not fit into the family structure.

During her first year at college, Katie often missed her family. She talked about how she loved them, and during holidays she eagerly helped with all the chores and participated in family events. After about a year and a half she decided to move back home and commute to a local college. Things went smoothly for awhile, but within a year Katie had moved to her own apartment. She told me that all of her earlier problems with her family had again become prominent. She said that by moving a short distance away she believed she could maintain satisfactory relations with her family while avoiding the false cheerfulness and excessive helpfulness which she had used to prove both that she loved them and that she was herself a family member.

Both of the above people had families who loved them and whom they loved. Both were materially comfortable and

neither had to contend with family members who drank excessively, abused them physically, stayed away from home or did any of the other more tangible injustices that one family member can do to hurt another. What was the problem?

Both Loretta and Katie, it seems to me, suffered a lack of personal sharing of themselves with other family members. Both indicated that they belonged in their families only in so far as the roles which they adequately enacted. Both needed a sense of sharing that went beyond maintenance of family structure.

Randy Huntsberry, a student at St. Clements, writes another example of the same kind of emptiness.

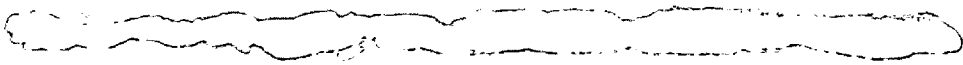
In my late adolescence God arrived stillborn. Not that I hadn't tried. There was a long labor. Everyday I laid myself open, my failures, my hopes. No response--only silence. There was nobody out there! Just the narcissistic waters of my own imagination.

For a long time, I just gazed at my reflection. I felt alone, bored and frightened. My fluttering stab at intimacy had been abortive. I had been talking to myself....¹

Many of us experience such a void. Many of us have satisfying families, financial stability, acceptable status. We love and know we are loved by friends and relatives. We have a variety of entertainments, an abundance of vocational choices, the freedom to choose life style and home...yet how many of us have felt "alone, bored and frightened"? How many of us have suddenly realized that, in the midst of

our peopled lives we are really talking only to ourselves? I know I have, and I do not believe that I am an exception to the norm. Many Americans with whom I have spoken have expressed a sense of estrangement from others, a lack of true sharing with others, a loss of Plato's "a having-in-common of pleasures and pain."²

The problem of this lack is complicated by the fact that few of us acknowledge that this is what is missing. Lack of sharing is difficult to clarify as a problem. First of all, this lack is not tangible enough to perceive easily as a problem. Second, many of us equate sharing and belonging with expressions of love, fulfillment of family roles, sharing of material possessions and blood or marital ties. "I belong in this family" often means "I was born into this family and I live here with my parents and two brothers." Third, many of us tell ourselves that we have plenty of sharing even when we do not. Families are *supposed* to involve sharing and members are *supposed* to feel that they belong. A taboo exists in our society against questioning what one personally derives from one's nuclear family. "Ask not what your family can do for you but what you can do for your family" expresses a popular attitude, and it usually refers to role enactment, the completion of necessary functions and efforts to keep the boat from rocking. I have heard people say that they would like a more personal intimacy within their families. I refer to this quality of shar-



ing as "community", as many have done before me.

Through the course of this paper I will set forth, clarify and integrate the following ideas:

The family is increasingly being looked to to provide a sense of intimate sharing and emotional belonging.

This sense of sharing, called "community" goes beyond role, structure and the satisfaction of material needs. Human beings often seek community.

All families have stories which they tell to define themselves, provide guidelines for attitudes and behavior, and give meaning to the family relationships. I refer to these stories as "myths."

All families engage in rituals: activities which enhance certain attitudes, beliefs and structures. Rituals also define the family and provide guidelines, but rituals are *enacted*.

I perceive that many families do not provide a desired sense of community for the individual members. I suggest that this lack of community results at least partially from the following factors:

- 1) the need for community is felt but not discussed. We do not have easy access to language that describes community, and it is not as tangible a need as are material and structural needs.

- 2) We do not acknowledge the importance of myths and rituals in our daily living. Problems related to our

myths and rituals go unsolved because we do not know how to approach them.

3) Myths and rituals may contradict one another. Specifically, a) myths may support community while rituals do not, b) some myths may support community while other myths in the same family denounce it, c) some rituals might enhance community while other rituals hinder it, d) myths and rituals may differ among family members and may cause serious clashes.

Consequently, we may *tell* ourselves that we have much sharing but *feel* that we do not, having no guidelines to clarify *what* is missing and *what* we can do to change it.

Myth, ritual and community are intricately bound up in one another. In an effort to clarify what this missing quality of sharing is and how myth and ritual contribute to it, I will discuss some basic views of the family, set forth several approaches to the concept of community, and discuss myths and rituals as hindrances and enhancers of community. I will then explore creative steps toward community within the family.

THE FAMILY

David A. Schulz offers us two definitions of "family," first citing George Peter Murdock:

The family is a social group characterized by common residence, economic cooperation and reproduction. It includes adults of both sexes, at least two of whom maintain a socially approved sexual relationship, and one or more children, own or adopted, of the sexually cohabiting adults.³

This is a "structural-functional approach"⁴ to the definition of "family." Schulz next cites Burgess, Locke, and Thomas, who deal with "family" in terms of roles:

The family may...be defined as a group of persons united by ties of marriage, blood, or adoption; constituting a single household; interacting and communicating with each other in their respective roles of husband and wife, mother and father, son and daughter, brother and sister; and creating and maintaining a common culture.⁵

These definitions deal with "family" in terms of structure, role and social function, but neither deals with the emotional or intellectual needs of the individual family member.

Are the individuals' emotional and intellectual requirements important considerations when looking at the family? Should the family be expected to meet some of these needs? I contend that the family should. Let us take a

brief look at some recent developments in the American family.

Ralph Turner writes:

Because of the wide range and importance of family functions a century or so ago it was hardly possible for an individual to enjoy full membership in society and take care of his basic needs for living except through membership in a family unit.⁶

The family was then needed for very concrete functions: food, shelter, protection, but according to Ralph Turner there have been two major changes within the past century: 1) a transfer of functions away from the family, and 2) independent growth of functions outside of the family. For example, economic functions now center around factories and other businesses. Combat functions have moved from the clan to the modern state. Protective functions involving old age security, personal crisis, defense of property, defense of life are now largely the responsibility of the government, charities, insurance companies, banks and so forth.

These two major changes suggest that family functions are diminishing. I suggest that the functions of the family are not declining but are changing. The contemporary American family is often looked to for relationship functions: functions involving personal interactions, emotional support, accountability of the individual to his/her duties and aspirations, and sanctuary from the external social world. These are less tangible functions than in earlier

times, are more difficult to perceive as important functions, and are therefore more easily neglected.

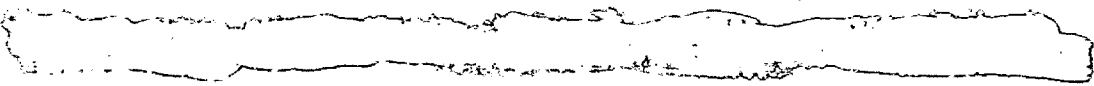
Companionship is one example of the many relationship functions:

"A function of companionship, involving the unity that develops out of mutual affection and intimate association of husband and wife and parents and children; is said to have become more important at the same time that traditional functions declined."⁷

Bossard and Boll point out a number of family trends from 1856 to 1945. Some of these may account for the shift to emphasis on relationship functions. According to Bossard and Boll, there have been shifts from large families to small ones, from stable groups to mobile ones, from adult-centered families to child-centered families, from neighborhood enclosed families to those isolated in urban environments.⁸ These shifts reflect more emphasis on those who do not yet contribute to the more concrete functions (few children provide food, shelter, protection or money) and a greater emotional demand from immediate family members in a world that lacks stability, familiarity and predictability.

The destruction of the traditional neighborhood and the heightened ephemerality and impersonality of the urban way of life have transferred the demand for intimate and durable interpersonal relationships increasingly onto the family.⁹

This change in functions is accompanied by an



increasing threat to the concept of the nuclear family. Amitai Etzioni, reviewing data on American families from 1967 to 1977 remarks:

Nine million children under the age of eighteen are being raised by one parent only, mostly by women....The growth rate of single-parent families has increased by 31.4 percent, almost three times the growth of two-parent families,¹⁰

and Bossard and Boll note, "We are the most divorced people in the world."¹¹ Ralph Turner points out a combination of two elements that affect the direction of family. First, there are responsible relationships: "Society has surrounded the family system with constraints, so that decisions to establish, terminate or alter family units radically are not made casually."¹² The second principle, spontaneity, states that "people establish or terminate family relationships primarily because they wish to, and that relationships among family members are governed by the members' feelings toward one another."¹³

Bronislaw Malinowski points out that modern women and men need depend neither on marriage nor on prostitution for sexual satisfaction. "Each can earn his or her own living, can play a role in public and political life, can move about independently."¹⁴ Even children can be raised in nurseries and schools or avoided altogether.

With most incentives gone, and with the advantages of marriage fading away and the hardships of

home life increasing, one often wonders not that marriage is affected, but that people still marry and bring forth families, that after divorce they remarry--in short that humanity still reproduces in the old-fashioned manner.¹⁵

Are we seeking something in nuclear families that we are not getting? Does this contribute to divorces, runaways, broken homes? Do we remarry in the faith that somehow we ~~will~~ attain ~~that~~ something through the family? Were we finding a sense of sharing and belonging in the nuclear family years ago, or did all the other, concrete functions, now emphasized elsewhere, satisfy our definition of family? Is it possible that those other, instrumental functions once utilized our time, energies and thoughts to the extent that we had no space to feel any emotional, or expressive, emptiness? Is it possible that we have only recently acknowledged emotional emptiness? Is it possible that we have only recently acknowledged emotional intimacy as a crucial aspect of family life and have therefore just recently sensed a void?

Before we can begin to answer such questions for ourselves we must look to the concepts of sharing and belonging, the nature of community.

COMMUNITY

A satisfactory understanding of "community" requires that we look at several different definitions.

If we ask what specifically differentiates an aggregation of individuals which is a community from one which is not, the answer will inevitably be either so narrow as to exclude many types of community or so vague and general that any aggregation of individuals whatsoever could be called a "community."¹⁶

The term "community" has been used to indicate everything from a physical location to a religious order to an intimate relationship among individuals who maintain contact with one another through letters and phone conversations. Roland L. Warren sets forth the following definition:

It is the inescapable fact that people's clustering together in space has important influences on their daily activities which gives us perhaps our best clue to a definition of the community as a social entity. We shall consider a community to be that combination of social units and systems which perform the major social functions having locality relevance.¹⁷

I refer to this definition as a "collectivity" or "association." I believe it is a widely accepted view of community: the idea of shared space, distribution of roles, performance of life necessities and social functions.

I suggested earlier that many people feel an emptiness which they cannot explain because 1) they tell themselves

that they have community and 2) they don't know how to define the very thing that they feel lacking. I believe that a major contributor to many problems is the failure to clarify what is wrong or what is missing.

In this case, many have substituted "collectivity" for "community." Even the *Readers Guide to Periodical Literature* tells the student of "Communal Living" to "See Collective Settlements."¹⁸

Warren's definition of "community" may be fine for a sociological study, and is widely accepted, but there is a less frequent, very useful definition of community which I would like to explore. Plato, you will recall, spoke of community as a "having-in-common of pleasures and pain." Dom Aelred Baker writes:

To any Benedictine monk...the very idea of 'community' is a basic assumption; not just the result of hermits or individuals coming together for convenience or survival. It is something that actually imposes itself on the individual, shaping his behavior and even perhaps his whole attitude to life in some important respects. Are not monks said to reflect some image or prototype of the community to which they belong?¹⁹

Here is something different from social structure, location, social functions. Baker is moving in the direction of "communitas," set forth by Victor W. Turner.

Turner uses the Latin "communitas" instead of "community" to distinguish his meaning from the more common idea of "an area of common living."²⁰ He does not refer to common space and social structure. Turner sets forth two major

models for human interrelationships. First is "society as a structured, differentiated, and often hierarchical system of politico-legal-economic positions with many types of evaluation, separating men in terms of 'more' and 'less.'²¹ The second model is "society as an unstructured or rudimentarily structured and relatively undifferentiated comitalus, community, or even communion of equal individuals who submit together to the general authority of the ritual elders."²²

Society ~~then~~ according to Turner, encompasses more than social structure, and so does family, ideally. Social structure includes hierarchical status, financial position, kinship norms, regulations and roles. Communitas does not. Communitas is a direct or total confrontation of human identities regardless of the significance of status, roles and other units of social structure.

Turner sets forth three forms of communitas. Spontaneous communitas is "a phase, a moment, not a permanent condition."²³ It is what William Blake may have referred to as "the winged moment as it flies"²⁴ or "mutual forgiveness of each vice."²⁵ Normative communitas is "where, under the influence of time, the need to mobilize or organize resources, and the necessity for social control among the members of the group in pursuance of these goals, the existential (spontaneous) communitas is organized into a perduring social system."²⁶ Ideological communitas deals with a

society based on spontaneous *communitas* but with additional ideological or utopian bases.²⁷ I personally feel that a group of people who already comprise a perduring social system or already have shared ideologies can, still later, experience spontaneous *communitas*.

I would like to dwell upon spontaneous, or existential *communitas*, as it underlies the other two. Spontaneous *communitas* can arise at any time between individuals who come into contact because of social structures (jobs, organizations, family, etc...) but *communitas* itself cannot be put into a structural form.

The relationship between spontaneous *communitas* and normative *communitas* is crucial. While the first is a confrontive experience which can only be temporary, normative *communitas* is a subtler awareness of sharing in humanness, continually underlying the group that has experienced spontaneous *communitas*. Three teenage girls "stick together through thick and thin." They do homework together, spend free time together, talk in the hallway between classes. They share certain tacitly agreed upon rules, and they understand what is expected from one another. Others refer to them as a clique and acknowledge that there is something special among these three. That something special may be normative *communitas*, an outgrowth of late night talks, disclosure of problems, and a momentary experience of profound sharing and understanding.

Any group of individuals that shares in spontaneous *communitas* is more likely to carry a subtler, underlying commonality even when that intense feeling of sharing and confrontation is absent. This subtler sharing is *communitas* as well, but it *grows out* of spontaneous *communitas*.

Turner refers to Martin Buber, saying "*communitas* is a relationship between concrete, historical, idiosyncratic individuals. These individuals are not segmentalized into roles and statuses but confront one another rather in the manner of Martin Buber's *I and Thou*." ²⁸ I would add that these individuals *are* in roles and statuses, but these become irrelevant in the I-Thou relationship. They *may* have helped to attain it by allowing the individuals to come into contact with and get to know one another.

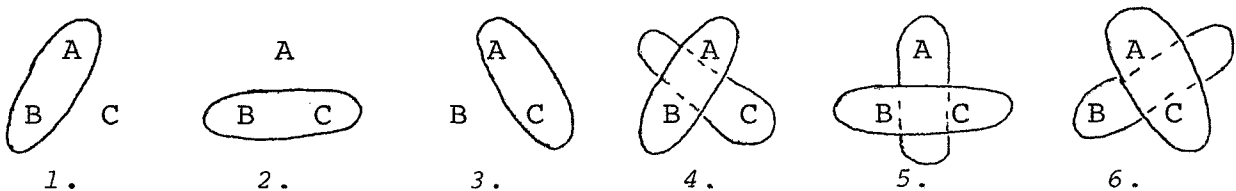
Community is the being no longer side by side (and, one might add, above and below) but *with* one another of a multitude of persons. And this multitude, though it moves towards one goal, yet experiences everywhere a turning to, a dynamic facing of, the others, a flowing from I to Thou. ²⁹

Buber uses such terms as "genuine conversation" and "acceptance of otherness" ³⁰ to convey the idea of complete awareness of one another, regardless of distinctions imposed upon individuals by social structure. When one relates to another as a status, a role, a social entity, one is involved in an I-It relationship and is not participating in true community. Community cannot come about merely by

thinking about it. It is "never a mere attitude of mind, and if it is feeling it is that of an inner constitution."³¹

How does Buber relate this to a group of more than two people? The sense of community within a group of persons then grows out of an acknowledgement of the whole being of another individual in a dyadic encounter.

William W. Wilmot sheds light on the importance of the dyadic encounter within the "We" in his discussion of the characteristics of dyads.³³ According to Wilmot, the dyad is the "building block" of other communication contexts. The dyad not only can function as a complete unit, but it cannot be subdivided without erasing the characteristics of that particular group, for "each person is confronted only by the other."³⁴ Wilmot goes on to say that a triad is composed of three people transacting face to face, but one can really be face to face with only one other at a time. A triad then is really a primary dyad plus one. The dyads can surely alter, but at any one moment it is highly unlikely that I can be simultaneously face to face with more than one other person. At any given moment, a triad is apt to be diagrammed in one of the following six ways:



In the first three drawings the triad consists of a dyad between two persons plus one lone person. In the second three illustrations, two persons form a dyad, and the third, lone person relates as in a dyad to the *unit* comprised of the other two individuals. For example, in #1, A relates to B as in a dyad. C remains alone. In #4, A relates to B as in a dyad, and C relates to the dyad formed by A and B. C remains outside the current dyad.

While community clearly differs from social structure, it cannot exist for long without social structure. I believe the family must involve some sort of balance between the two.

the crucial difficulty of all utopias--that they have to produce life necessities through work--in economists' jargon, to mobilize resources. To mobilize resources also means to mobilize people. This implies social organization, with its 'ends' and 'means' and necessary 'deferment of gratifications,' and all these entail the establishment, however transient, of orderly structural relations between man and man.³⁵

Turner claims that *communitas* develops a structure "in which free relationships between individuals become converted into norm-governed relationships between social personae,"³⁶ explaining why normative and ideological *communitas* are set forth as outgrowths of spontaneous *communitas*. One can however have the norm-governed structures without ever experiencing *communitas*. In families there is often structure before spontaneous *communitas*, and *communitas* may never come

about. Structure does not necessarily prevent community but the presence of a family structure is not sufficient for the creation of community. "Wisdom," says Turner,

is always to find the appropriate relationship between structure and *communitas* under the given circumstances of time and place, to accept each modality when it is paramount without rejecting the other, and not to cling to one when its present impetus is spent.³⁷

Does this mean that if there is no true community in one's family that one should not try to instill it? If we cannot force community, can we encourage it, and does it need to be intentionally maintained? I will address these questions further on in the paper.

Community does not necessitate a loss of individuality. Paul Tillich writes:

To understand the highly dialectical nature of participation it is necessary to think in terms of power instead of in terms of things. The partial identity of definitely separated things cannot be thought of. But the power of being can be shared by different individuals.³⁸

Herein lies a crucial difference between community and collectivity. In a collectivity each person has separate roles, statuses and functions. In a community, they share a sense of commonality, belonging, power of being...even though they daily enact different roles and duties. One really cannot separate their power or sense of sharing because such sharing can be seen only in terms of the whole in which the

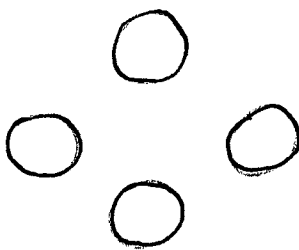
individuals are involved.

Communication authorities often view power in terms of ability to influence. Brown and Keller define an individual's power as "the capacity to induce another person to act or change in a given direction."³⁹ Pace, Boren and Peterson state that "To be able to exert an influence over its members, a group must have power, which represents the ability to bring forces to bear on a person so he or she will think and act like the others,"⁴⁰ and Paul Watzlawick classifies all relationships as either 1) symmetrical: based on a struggle to establish or maintain equality or 2) complementary: based on acceptance and enjoyment of differences and an agreement upon how the power is to be distributed.⁴¹

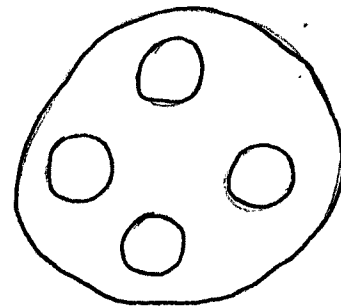
These approaches to the concept of power contribute much to our understanding of the formation and maintenance of relationships and the behaviors within these relationships, but they do not describe power as Tillich uses it and as I mean it here. The "power of being" refers neither to power over another person nor to the power which one might accord to another individual with whom one is interacting. Power

~~_____~~
~~_____~~

is indeed the ability to cause or prevent change, not only with regard to others but concerning oneself and one's surroundings as well. The relevant concern here is not *what* one changes or *how* one changes it, but the very fact that one *does* influence change as long as one exists. I cannot exist without evoking change. There can be no *being* without *power*. To participate with others then is to exist both as individuals *and* as members of a whole that is more than the sum of the individual persons involved. The difference between persons existing as totally separate entities and persons sharing their "Power of Being" in something that encompasses all of them might be illustrated in the following manner:



1.



2.

Community influences our lives to a great extent. The young boy who seeks the advice and company of a favorite teacher because "I can't talk with my father" expresses a

need for personal sharing. The woman who changes jobs because she feels she has "nothing in common" with her colleagues although they are all interested in the same field of work is manifesting her need for a more rewarding sense of sharing. Common interests, similar personalities, good times, warm fuzzies are important factors that attract us to others, but there is something more that draws us into community with others, "a transformative experience that goes to the root of each person's being and finds in that root something profoundly communal and shared."⁴²

This "communal and shared" quality may be impossible to clarify for someone who has never experienced it. Nevertheless, perhaps everyone has felt it, and the task at hand is to verbalize and clarify what we all already know. Glenn R. Bucher expresses this need in his description of Westminster/Scot, an attempt at community living:

"The common humanity of us all, heretofore essentially private and therefore unexposed, lay before us. It was the need to share our humanness that drove us in search of community."⁴³

There are certain basic attributes of being human. We all experience finitude, anxiety, failure, responsibility and freedom, although each person experiences these and other factors in unique ways. We often fail to see that these traits are common to other people. Individuals cut themselves off from individuals and become closed, blind to the potential support and emotional growth available in

②

contact with others. It is this contact, this exposure of commonality which many seek in the community experience.

There is another function of community. The individual fills certain roles, positions and social statuses, but these are not enough to define the person. One needs a sense of sharing with others on a deeper basis than is needed for social classification. "Only in continuous encounter with other persons does the person become and remain a person. The place of this encounter is the community."⁴⁴

Human life and humanity come into being in genuine meetings. There man learns not merely that he is limited by man, cast upon his own finitude, partialness, need for completion, but, his own relation to truth is heightened by the other's different relation to the same truth--different in accordance with his individuation, and destined to take seed and grow differently. Men need, and it is granted to them, to confirm one another in their individual being by means of genuine meetings. But beyond this they need, and it is granted to them, to see that truth, which the soul gains by its struggle, is flashing up for the others, the brothers, in a different way, and equally confirmed.⁴⁵

Equally important is community's support of the individual for "no self-acceptance is possible if one is not accepted in a person-to-person relation."⁴⁶ Buber emphasizes this need for interpersonal acceptance in the following quote:

Man as man is an audacity of life, undetermined and unfixed; he therefore ~~is not a person~~ and he can naturally only receive this as individual man,

in that others and he himself confirm him in his being-this-man. Again and again the Yes must be spoken to him, from the look of the confidant and from the stirrings of his own heart, to liberate him from the dread of abandonment, which is a fore-taste of death.⁴⁷

Let us turn to the stories and rites which can encourage or hinder the experience of community.

MYTH

Mystery, wonder, the future. The first seems outmoded, the second childish, the third hopeless. Yet man cannot live without mystery and wonder; he cannot stop thinking about the future.⁴⁸

Mystery, wonder and the future are all important facets of significant relationships. Mystery and wonder reflect feelings of uniqueness, purpose and worthiness, while future implies a sense of permanence or at least of something more than momentary. We need myths/stories to maintain a sense of mystery, wonder and future in our personal relationships.

Dan P. Millar and Frank E. Millar refer to myth only in negative terms. Myth is viewed as a fallacy that hinders development of an accurate self-image and impairs effective communication.⁴⁹

Contrary to Millar's and Millar's perception, a myth does not have to refer to an untruth or a hindrance. In fact, Mircea Eliade defines myth as a "true story," in that everything within it directly concerns those who uphold it, while a tale or fable refers to events that do not directly affect the condition of the people in question. Myth, according to Eliade, supplies models for human behavior and therefore gives meaning and value to life. It also tells how a reality came into existence, be it the whole of creation or only a segment, such as a species of animal, a kind of human behavior, a particular institution.

Larry D. Shinn differentiates between psychological approaches to myth and sociological approaches.⁵⁰ I have drawn up the following chart to briefly sum up these distinctions.

Approaches to Myth		
Psychological		Sociological
primitive form of philosophy.	Symbolic process of the unconscious.	
Frazer, Tylor.	Freud, Jung, Bhattacharji .	Malinowski, Durkheim .
primitive answers to life's great problems. resolves human problems and conflicts.	Psychoanalytic. Unconscious is the source for both mythic symbols and their need for expression.	Myths essentially social in origin and function. Myths serve as charters for social beliefs, and serve to legitimate social institutions.



Shinn stresses that "the history of the study of myth is to a great extent a history of reductionism."⁵¹ Heeding the wisdom of this last quote, I set forth the following items as *generally* important criteria of myth. A myth: 1) is a "true story" to those who tell it because it directly affects them. (This does not mean it is perceived as factually true.) 2) supplies models for human behavior 3) gives meaning and value to the relationship and/or situation and/or life which it concerns. (The degree of meaning or positiveness of the value vary.) 4) explains how a relationship or situation came into existence and/or explains how it continues to exist.

A myth speaks to man from his own profoundest depths and communicates to him the profoundest aspirations--and the fears--of his whole world. A culture without myths, it has been shown, would be a culture that could not function, since myth makes meaning and meaning is another name for motivation.⁵²

Kees W. Bolle claims that myth is essential to the human constitution, and distinguishes between myth in general and the cosmogonic, or creation myth. According to Bolle, the cosmogonic myth is only one type,⁵³ and William Paul Newey points out that myth is not "the creaky vehicle of primitive ethics and of pseudo-science that it has long been considered."⁵⁴ Ernest G. Bormann speaks of fantasy in similar ways to my use of myth:

A fantasy, according to Bormann is a dramatization of a hypothetical or actual situation. It

includes a recollection of something that happened in the past to the group, a reflection of the group's present situation and its relationship to the external environment, and a dream of what the group might do in the future. A fantasy chain is set up in the group when a participant communicates symbols that relate either to the group's here-and-now problems or to the individual psychodynamics of of the participants. Such communications, which cause the members of the group to empathize, to improvise on the same theme, or to respond emotionally, form fantasies that tend to be played out in a more and more complete way until they reflect the members' common preoccupations and serve to make these commonalities public.⁵⁵

We have here a description similar both to myth and to ritual. I will elaborate on ritual later in the paper.

Joseph Campbell views myths almost solely in terms of cosmogony, but I find it helpful in understanding myths to review his description of the four main functions of myth. Let us first look briefly at a cosmogonic myth of the Ngadju Dayak of Borneo, then apply each of Campbell's four functions to this story in an effort to understand these functions.

For the Dayak, the cosmogonic myth discloses the eventful creation of the world and of man and, at the same time, the principles which govern the cosmic process and human existence....Through the cosmogonic myth and its sequel, the Dayak progressively unveils the structures of reality and of his own proper mode of being. What happened in the beginning describes at once both the original perfection and the destiny of each individual.⁵⁶

Briefly, in the beginning the cosmic totality was still undivided in the mouth of the coiled watersnake. Eventually two mountains arise and from their repeated clashes the cosmic reality comes progressively into existence: clouds,

hills, sun, moon, etc....The mountains are seats of the two supreme deities and are also the deities themselves. At the end of the first part of creation they reveal their human form. In human form, Mahatala and his wife, Putir pursue the cosmogonic work and create the upperworld and the underworld. There is still no intermediary world and no men to inhabit it. Two hornbills, a male and a female, who are identical with the two supreme deities fly to the tree of life (raised in the "Center" by Mahatala) and meet each other in the branches. They fight and, as a result, severely damage the tree. From the knots of the injured tree and the moss falling from the beak of the female hornbill come a man and a woman, the ancestors of the Dayak. The tree of life is finally destroyed and the two birds kill each other. The deities have represented themselves in the form of mountain, human (Mahatala and Putir) and bird. Totality is made up of opposites.

"But from destruction and death spring the cosmos and a new life. The new creation originates in the death of the total godhead. In the most important religious ceremonies--birth, initiation, marriage, death--this creative clash is tirelessly reiterated. As a matter of fact, everything which is significant in the eyes of the Dayak is an imitation of exemplary models and a repetition of the events narrated in the cosmogonic myth." For example, the bridal pair always clasps a replica of the tree of life, for to clasp the tree of life means to form a unity with it.⁵⁷

According to Campbell, a properly operating myth fills four functions. The first is to "waken and maintain

in the individual a sense of awe and gratitude in relation to the mystery dimension of the universe,"⁵⁸ so that the person recognizes his involvement in that mystery. I believe that the above Dayak myth offers the individual an explanation for his existence, which is very much tied into grand universal schemes much greater than he. The individual sees that, if not for the terrible destruction before him, he would never have come into being. The second function is "to offer an image of the universe that will be in accord with the knowledge of the time, the sciences, and the fields of action of the folk to whom the mythology is addressed."⁵⁹ I suggest that the Dayak sees the cosmogonic myth not only as a creation story but also as a manifestation of the perpetual tension which he enacts in his daily living and as a description of the death-leading-to-new-life theme which is also a vital part of his entire life. The third function is to "validate, support, and imprint the norms of a given, specific moral order, that, namely, of the society in which the individual is to live."⁶⁰ Again, I believe that many of the norms and rules of the Dayak culture center around or at least incorporate the theme of tension between opposites and the idea of destruction leading to new life. The creation story justifies and supports these norms for the individual who participates in them. The fourth function is "to guide him, stage by stage, in health, strength, and harmony of spirit, through the whole foreseeable course of a useful

life."⁶¹ Once again, the two major themes serve to guide the Dayak, explaining otherwise unexplainable phenomena, justifying his own existence, and providing him with guide lines for his own behavior in various life situations.

On the occasion of each decisive crisis and each rite de passage, man takes up again ab initio the world's drama. The operation is carried out in two times: 1. the return to primordial totality, and 2. the repetition of the cosmogony, that is to say, the breaking up of the primitive unity.⁶²

Referring back to these mystical functions, one can clarify at least some of the functions of myths in interpersonal relationships. I suggest that the underlying functions of all myths are essentially the same. One can regard the functions of relational myths in the following manner:

1) to enhance in the individual a sense of wonder, uniqueness and purpose in the relationship and to strengthen one's involvement in the relationship, 2) to offer an image of the relationship that fits into the present scheme of things, 3) to validate and support the norms of a relationship for the people involved, 4) to guide the participants through the course of the relationship.

Let us look briefly now at a relationship myth. A fairly common family myth is summed up in the statement "Blood is thicker than water." This claim carries factual truth. Blood is indeed a thicker substance than water, but the implication of the saying is that blood-ties warrant greater loyalty, care, duty and devotion than do other



relationships. People have been known to leave loved ones for the sake of their parents and siblings, to defend relatives against adversaries regardless of the adversaries' positions or points of view, to take in orphaned nieces and nephews when they have no interest at all in child-rearing, to travel hundreds of miles to the funeral of a relative that they did not like...because "blood is thicker than water."

One of the functions of a relational myth is to enhance in the individual a sense of wonder, uniqueness and purpose in the relationship and to strengthen one's awareness of one's involvement in the relationship. The "blood is thicker than water" myth emphasizes the specialness of one's relationship to one's nuclear or blood family. Others cannot share in that specialness. Others can participate in their own families, but the uniqueness of *this* family has been given a unique responsibility to those other family members. In addition, upholders of the "blood is thicker than water" myth usually recognize that this is the only blood-family they will ever have (with the addition of their own children, of course).

The second purpose of the myth is to offer an image of the relationship (to the participants, not to external people) that fits into the present scheme of things: "the time, the sciences and the fields of action" of the participants. The particular myth in question fills this function

especially well in our society, for the contemporary American culture emphasizes nuclear families. Our economic, moral and social structures are founded on the concept of small family units operating with their own best interests in mind. This is especially clear if we refer back to the section on family earlier in the paper. Families have become smaller, more mobile and more isolated in the urban environment.

The third function of the relational myth is to "validate, support and imprint the norms" of a given specific relationship for the individual engaging in it. Many of the norms of the family can be justified and supported merely because they *are* family norms and are not to be questioned, provided the individual accepts the "blood is thicker than water" myth. I know a young man who left his fiancée because his parents disapproved of her. At first he rebelled against them, but the estrangement from his family and the knowledge that he was going against their wishes was too much for him to take. He left the woman and returned to his family.

The fourth function is to guide the participants, in "health, strength, and harmony of spirit" through the course of the relationship. Many people find strength and happiness in the knowledge that family members will support them in times of crisis.

These four functions can easily be applied to other

family myths. Several examples of such myths are: 1) "One Big Happy Family," in which things may go wrong but the ideal of perpetually good feelings about one another and contentment whenever family members are together prevails, and 2) "All American Family," in which ideals of tradition, patriotism and loyalty to established American customs and institutions are seen as the guidelines and characteristics of the individual members and of the family as a whole.

Many common fairy tales or classical myths readily serve as labels for living family myths. "The Knight in Shining Armor and the Damsel in Distress" might apply to a couple in which the man is viewed as strong, protective and brave, while the woman appears helpless, defenseless and in the throes of impending doom. Such a myth can be used to explain how the relationship came about, how it is important and how it is to be continued. "Snow White and the Seven Dwarves" easily applies itself to a "One Big Happy Family" situation in which everything somehow focuses on one central figure, perhaps a parent.

These functions cannot be viewed literally if we are to apply them successfully to many different relationships. I can, for example, cite relationships in which the participants appeared to be anything but healthy, strong and harmonious, yet these relationships continue and the participants would not dream of ending them. Stanley and Stella of "A Streetcar Named Desire" can seem to be a very

unsuccessful couple, but *they* see their relationship as healthy and positive. Similarly, one person in a friendship may complain constantly about the relationship, yet actually derive much satisfaction both from it and from the complaining as well.

I believe that observers who judge another relationship as unsuccessful often base their evaluations on the mythology of their own relationships. Witness to an argument between two friends of ours, my husband and I have been astounded by their apparent lack of honesty with one another, yet they have found our bluntness uncomfortable and unconstructive. Both evaluations can be rooted in the myths of very satisfying relationships, but the successful mythology of one relationship does not necessarily work well in another.

How then can we identify an inadequate myth, and how do myths tie in with the problem of community in the family? Let me first set forth some qualities of undesirable myths, then look at myth and community.

One possible flaw in a faulty relational myth is that the myth is one in which we *think* we are living, but which no longer is active. One might ask "if I believe a myth is real and present, isn't that the same as saying it *is* real?" Yes, the myth is real, but it is not necessarily functional or as desirable as a different myth might be. The question of whether the myth is "false" or "true is irrelevant. Rather, the question should be "does the myth

work well in that relationship?" What is the function of the myth in that relationship?

For example, a family holds onto the myth that they are an all-American, clean-cut family with honest law-abiding parents and obedient, conservative children. One of the children becomes involved with hard drugs. No one else in the family sees this (after all, it isn't part of the myth) and eventually little Johnny is tripping right under their noses. The myth is still present, although the story it tells is not historically real anymore. The myth might live for a long time, and the family might never realize what Johnny is doing because it clashes too harshly with guidelines of the family picture. The myth may not function satisfactorily for all family members. It may lead to many problems within the family, such as negative feelings, lack of open communication, distrust, frustration, general estrangement from one another, etc... On the other hand, Johnny might play along with the family's self-concept, little minding the discrepancy between family myth and his actual actions. Everyone can relate satisfactorily to one another under this set-up. Is the myth dysfunctional? No. A myth can suffice while not being as good as another. One myth can *do* while another can encourage a really rewarding relationship. A myth can be *functional* as in the above situation yet not be particularly desirable or conducive to positive, creative relationships.

A second quality of a faulty myth is that it is no longer positive for everyone involved. It separates people who are interdependent instead of bringing them closer together. "Daddy's Little Girl" may love to participate in this role until the age of twelve, whereupon she rebels against the idea of being a cute, dependent baby. A once positive myth has become a source of torment. The story which drew father and daughter together now irritates the girl and estranges her from him.

Still another trait of some faulty myths is that they no longer lend value or meaning to the relationship. Two close brothers may live out a guru-disciple myth. Little Brother idolizes Big Brother and wants to be as good as he in everything. Big Brother protects and teaches the younger. As the disciple outgrows his admiration and need for the older brother he may find that his brother still needs to be the teacher-protector. Perhaps the younger boy goes along with the myth for awhile, maybe all of his life, yet it no longer holds any real value for him. This again sets forth a myth which is believed by and helps only some of the relationship participants. I would again ask if this myth is as desirable as another might be.

Sometimes the best solution to a faulty relational story or myth is to end the relationship. It is asking too much of many people to always expect them to change "for the sake of" the relationship. All of us have something that

we will not compromise. Often, however, relationships can be saved or improved if the participants can clarify *what* the myths, or stories are, *if* they are dysfunctional or undesirable, *how* they are so, and how the myths can *change* to better the relationship for everyone concerned.

I am particularly interested here with myths that deal with community (or fail to do so), for example: myths which encourage and maintain collectivities but give no emphasis to the importance of community. Martin Buber expresses concern that people are suffering a loss of true community, true awareness of the other person, and true sharing of one's basic humanness with another. Instead, people are caught up in *collectivities*, groups which focus upon surface feeling, rôles, and physical needs. Many families appear to be collectivities with little or no community. It is important to note that this kind of myth would be dysfunctional only if the people involved felt a need for the type of sharing which is community. Those who want a collectivity and have their needs met through a collectivity are probably best off with collectivity stories, but other people tell themselves pseudo-community stories and enact collectivities simultaneously. Many "One Big Happy Family" myths encourage collectivity under the guises of true sharing and belonging. Members each play a "Happy Family" rôle while upholding family love and "Happy as Long as We're Together" ideals. Participants may wonder why the

family is not particularly satisfying. The lack of true sharing is not dealt with in such a myth. The lack may be present and felt, but the myth offers no guidelines to clarify or rectify the problem. This type of myth is particularly deceptive because it *seems* to uphold community. A family story which blatantly denies the existence of sharing and belonging can be just as destructive as a family story which only seems to uphold community. To be aware of the fact that one's family involves little or no intimate sharing is not necessarily enough to correct the problem.

Fantasies have a way of clinging to us and becoming ever more deeply entrenched unless we deliberately take a good look at our private fairy tales and dispense with them. Otherwise they are likely to be around as long as we are. We age. They don't.⁶³

We can look at the stories we use as guidelines and ask ourselves: do these stories encourage community among us? Do they encourage collectivity? Do they provide clear guidelines for us? How could our myths change to better our relationship? Finally, how do our myths interact with our rituals?

One function of myth is certainly to explain ritual, and so far as ritual is executed the benefit of a community myth is apt to penetrate into this community's history as exemplifying the *mos maiorum*.⁶⁴

Many people express a void in their lives because of a lack of sharing with others. Emma in the movie "The Turning Point"

epitomizes the person who "has everything" yet suffers extreme solitude. The woman is surrounded by friends, lovers, admirers. She has fame and success as a dancer. She is empty inside, has no real sharing with anyone. She realizes this and shows it when she asks an old wooer to marry her. He would once have gladly divorced his wife for her, but now turns her down. One gets the feeling that any man would do for Emma. Buber writes:

What is peculiarly characteristic of the human world is above all that something takes place between one being and another the like of which can be found nowhere in nature....Man is made man by it; but on its way it does not merely unfold, it also decays and withers away.⁶⁵

Community must be maintained and rejuvenated, but how do we reinforce those encounters? I will address this issue shortly.

Huntsberry sets forth a striking contrast between community and association and also points out the danger of substituting the latter for the first:

Nor could I find the 'social' in social utility. Everyone related impersonally, like parts of a machine. I sought community in voluntary associations, but was horrified to discover myself trying to weld each organization into an efficient machine. People were lost on the organizational charts and job sheets. I was plugging people into a managerial myth...I had discovered, as had many Americans before me, that 'organization seemed to destroy community.' (Wilson, 1968, 174) There seemed to be no place for community.⁶⁶



We have several critical problems here. First is the danger of structure overpowering community. Second is the inevitable dying of true community if it is not nurtured. Oddly enough, both these problems can be creatively dealt with by the very use of structure. Let us turn now to a look at structure in the form of ritual.

RITUAL

Sullinger points out that the term "ritual" was once used chiefly by anthropologists and students of religion. Ritual was therefore considered irrelevant to modern life.⁶⁷ Ritual grew to be defined as:

...a form of interaction that comes to be definitely prescribed formal procedure, arising out of a family interaction, involving a pattern of defined behavior, which is directed toward some specific end or purpose and which acquires rigidity and a sense of rightness as a result of its continuing history. Thus, defined, ritual develops in connection with many aspects of family life, but clusters chiefly about such things as holidays, anniversary days, meals, vacations, religious worship, and collective ways of using leisure time.⁶⁸

Ritual serves as a vital and common facet of contemporary daily living. Everyone incorporates ritual into their lives.

We are all ritualists; yet most of us never think about this common bond, for we have been conditioned to think of ritual in terms of the witches coven in Rosemary's Baby, the Manson tribal sacrifices, or the choreographed movement of the satin-clad, incense-burning priest. We, who think of ourselves as ritual outsiders, go on planning our cocktail parties, attending football classics, making love against the popular ideal of The Sensuous Man/Woman, never imagining that these and so many other life activities open the door to membership in the club.⁶⁹

Bossard and Boll say that ritual is something to be done, not something to be thought about.⁷⁰ Murray Davis elaborates on the importance of this idea in his book, *Intimate Relations*.

Davis sets forth a number of ways in which intimates may enhance a sense of closeness. The activities emphasized by Davis all involve a sharing of oneself with the other. These include:

- 1) Shared parts of the body
i.e. sexual intercourse
blood brothers ritual
statements such as "I give you my heart"
- 2) Physical movements
i.e. dancing together
- 3) Shared objects
i.e. using common possessions
giving gifts from one's personal belongings
- 4) Sharing one's personal culture
i.e. discussing books, places, etc...
- 5) Sharing one's past
i.e. explaining past incidents of one's life.⁷¹

It is important to note here that activities such as sharing one's past are *more* than the conveyance of information. Over and above the learned facts, such activities help intimates to nurture closeness, to "foster the fusion of their souls."⁷²

There are two ways in which ritual is instituted, according to Frederick Goodrich Henke. The first is through trial and error, without any intentional thought. The second way involves voluntary manipulation of the outside world. Thought helps to bring about change.

Bossard and Boll claim that ritual has three consistent traits:

- 1) it is definitely prescribed.
- 2) it has an element of rigidity.

3) there is a sense of rightness which emerges from the past history of the process. The more it occurs the more it is approved. "To deviate from the procedure is wrong, not wholly on utilitarian grounds, but also because it breaks the rhythm and the rapport."⁷⁴ Apparently there is a threat involved in changing a ritual. It may be that many who *could* change rituals to enhance community are afraid to because they are secure in their present rituals. The family that watches T.V. every night after dinner may not really look forward to spending the evening that way, but it's the way they have always spent it, and they are comfortable with it. Why risk a change for something less certain?

Ritual does not equal ceremony, for "ritual may involve very little of the pomp and trappings ordinarily associated with the ceremonial,"⁷⁵ but neither does ritual equal just any procedure. Eric Berne describes a procedure as a learned series of simple complementary adult transactions directed toward a manipulation of reality. Ritual, according to Berne, is a stereotyped series of simple complementary transactions programmed by external forces.⁷⁶ While I do not intend to go deeply into Berne's major concepts in this paper, his explanation of procedure and ritual serves

to clarify an interesting distinction between the two. Both procedure and ritual are *learned*. Both, according to Berne, are stereotyped. That is, once any procedure or ritual has been started, the rest of the process is predictable and follows a predetermined course to an anticipated conclusion unless unusual circumstances arise, but a procedure aims to *change* some aspect of reality while a ritual does not.⁷⁷ Berne explains that many rituals start out as procedures, eventually ~~lose~~ their procedural purposes yet still retain their usefulness as "acts of faith."⁷⁸ For example, Grandma may always carve the turkey on Thanksgiving because she is the best turkey-carver. This is a procedure, but as time passes and several of the family members become competent carvers themselves, Grandma continues to do the honors on holidays because "Grandma always does it." A once necessary procedure has become an acceptable ritual.

Berne claims that procedures are programmed by the Adult and rituals are programmed by the Parent.⁷⁹ Put simplistically, this means that procedures are patterned by our own perceptions of what we need to accomplish while rituals are based on "external social forces." We enact a ritual because we always have or because that's what we have been taught and it *seems* right. Based on this explanation, a ritual would not be something that one or several individuals would *decide* to program into their lives. It would either already exist as an operating ritual or start as a procedure



and evolve into a ritual.

Berne's distinction between an intent to manipulate reality and an act of faith is useful, as is his statement that many procedures lose their original purpose and are maintained as rituals. It is also clear that many rituals are accepted because they have always been and we feel we "should" maintain them. Berne, however, depicts ritual as rather limited in its flexibility.

Not all rituals, in my opinion, are accepted merely because we are accustomed to them. We *can* intentionally program rituals into our lives, even if all this means is taking a current procedure and consciously transforming it into ritual. For example, a family meets in the kitchen every night over a period of a month to discuss plans for a major move to another state. Each night at the same hour everyone gathers around the table, shares a snack, chats for a bit and then turns to one of the important issues to be discussed. After the move, several family members suggest that the evening talks continue even though the need for a scheduled family meeting has apparently passed. Family members acknowledge that the talks have enhanced a sense of closeness within the family, and that something is missing now without them. The evening talks are therefore institutionalized into the family schedule.

Rituals serve many purposes in social life. They:

serve as group habits, standardized affectionate responses, become the core of family etiquette, give added meaning to religious and holiday observances and contribute to group adjustment and family continuity.⁸⁰

A particularly crucial function of rituals is overlooked by Sullenger. Social Exchange theorists contend that while the rewards of an intimate relationship can be far greater than those with a casual acquaintance, the costs are also more demanding. It takes far more energy to sustain a close relationship than a casual one. Murray S. Davis concludes that each force that holds intimates together keeps falling back to a more stable acquaintance level. "In order to revitalize their ever-sagging esprit de corps intimates must perform periodic ceremonies."⁸¹ Such ceremonies, according to Davis are intentionally planned to renew relationships.

Contrary to Davis, I do not believe that all rejuvenating rituals are planned, especially with that particular purpose in mind, for, as Berne has pointed out, many rituals are continued simply because they have acquired an intrinsic sense of rightness, but one particularly valuable function of many rituals is indeed to revitalize and sustain the intimate relationship.

Ritual, both planned and unintentional, inundates our daily lives, from the carefully enacted bar mitzvah to the casually prepared supper.

Once ritual is thought of as a process of interaction rather than in terms of some pietistic end, then sherry before dinner may become as much a ritual as family prayers before going to bed.⁸²

Ritual can be a solitary performance, though it is not often so. Ritual principally involves interaction, and this fact makes ritual a vital contributor to the quality of family community, for by its very nature ritual encourages participation, and without participation, there can be no groundwork laid for the occurrence of community. "...a family rite is a dependable occasion of family social consciousness."⁸³ Ritual does not result in community, but it can encourage group awareness of the family's potential for community.

Evan Zuesse provides a thorough explanation of ritual in his article, "Meditation on Ritual." Zuesse points out that there is a strong anti-ritual bias in the West. The notion of ritual is considered lightly. One reason for this is that:

Ritual is difficult to interpret precisely because it is so present, so fulfilled in itself, that it can dispense with further interpretation or native exegesis (and often does).⁸⁴

Ritual, according to Evan Zuesse, expresses its meaning and purpose in its very enactment. Another reason for the bias is that many associate ritual with "primitive," "crude" or "uncivilized" people. We shun the unadvanced and the untechnological. Consequently, we may abhor the idea that ritual

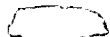
pervades our lives. Zuesse says that myth is not the explanation of ritual.

Ritual is something that is *done*, and that means *doing*, while myth is something that is *said*, and that involves *explanation*. The temptation is great as a consequence to take myth as the explanation of ritual, and to look no further into ritual itself, but this is a grave error. However inarticulate ritual is, it still possesses deep symbolic value and meaning, all the more perhaps for its preliminary silence. Myth is complementary, but it cannot replace the meanings of ritual. Ritual gestures forth the world as meaningful and ordered.⁸⁵

The individual needs ritual, not just to order the world and make it meaningful, but to encourage interaction with others, for we need interpersonal interaction and we are strongly influenced by it.

Absolute being has no need for ritual; it stands outside of time and space, and no contacts compromise its self-sufficiency. But an identity that is built through actions and the interconnections with an environment is one that requires ritual to the same degree that it requires a meaningfully structured Cosmos. The self is defined through the presence of Others, and this necessarily means in actions.⁸⁶

Ritual again stands as a crucial means of involving oneself with others. My interaction with others strongly influences my behavior and my self-concept. Ritual helps to define and structure that interaction.

Zuesse examines Buber's main concepts in *I and Thou*. Buber says there can be ritualization of the genuine encounter. "No preconceived norms or rites can apply,"⁸⁷ but Zuesse feels that "if no one exists in a mode sufficient to such an 

encounter outside of that encounter, then neither is there anyone to meet *in* it, and so no encounter.⁸⁸ Norms and rites affect the interaction outside of the encounter and therefore, in my opinion, affect the actual encounter, if only in an indirect way. Buber also says that the I-Thou and the I-It are very separate, except that one can remember the I-Thou encounter and thus hope for a future I-Thou during one's I-It interactions. According to Zuesse, when one encounters a Thou there is a crucial added dimension. One encounters the Thou "in a frail and precious vessel, the finite other person....In the encounter all the creatureliness of the other is first made real and present to me, the vulnerable incompleteness of the Thou."⁸⁹ One would expect not only that one's I-It relations affect the I-Thou, but that the I-Thou encounters enrich further I-It relations as well.

How does this tie in with the family? Do people enact any rites that are peculiar to the family? If rituals can amount to simple things such as sherry before dinner, do we perform many daily rituals without the slightest recognition of their meaning and their impact upon us?

"The study of family rituals has been neglected largely because of the lack of understanding of the real social significance of the ritual in everyday living. Rituals have been confused with cultural complexes. Also there has been a tendency to accept them as part of the total situation and not as entities within themselves. In reality there can be no real understanding of the many aspects of the modern

family without more knowledge of the basic phenomena which include many rituals. We have had a tendency to take these for granted."⁹⁰

Bossard and Boll conducted a study of ritual in family living, looking at its nature, its changing significance and its role in family relationships and child development.⁹¹ The study was based on some 400 case records obtained from six sources: autobiographies, university student essays, and questionnaires filled out by residents surrounding a social settlement, residents in a middle-class suburban area, members of the Junior League and a group of unselected adults who agreed to participate.

Some subjects expressed antagonism toward the idea of ritual in family life, associating ritual with backwards people. Other subjects were in the process of breaking away from certain family rituals. Some expressed "a long and proud past in the prevailing culture, whose members are pleased to recall the rituals in their experience, and who treasure them in later life."⁹² Bossard and Boll write "On the whole we are inclined to conclude that the attitude of a person toward ritual is a fairly reliable index of his integration into his background."⁹³ Bossard and Boll feel that rebellion against family, church, and other institutions seems to express itself in attitudes toward ritual. One's attitudes toward ritual also seem to match one's acceptance of the group, culture, or family in which the ritual occurs.⁹⁴

Reviewing their survey:

Some rituals stimulated healthy family interaction. The mere formalizing of a time and/or place for certain family members to be together for a purpose gave rise to increased family interplay and, in turn, to the enrichment of their rites.⁹⁵

Any ritual that elicits family member interaction however is not necessarily enough. Bossard and Boll found that some rituals could create estrangement among participants if they were imposed on unwilling members. They also noted that "The relative position of family members was crystallized in many family rituals; for status, roles, and dominance relationships were clearly and repeatedly defined."⁹⁶ Bossard and Boll suggest that "A feeling of belonging in a family and of not just living in it might well correlate with the frequency and intensity of these rites."⁹⁷

Family rituals cluster around holidays, anniversaries, vacations, meals, worship and collective ways of spending leisure time. Rituals are characterized by routine, rigidity and a sense of rightness or wrongness. In many families, for example, the holiday meal is highly ritualized, from the menu to the seating arrangement to who carves the turkey.

Bossard and Boll claim that "The existence of well-established rituals implies...a considerable amount of like-mindedness among the members of a family."⁹⁸ If this were true one could assume that family members do accept the stories along with the rituals, but I ask which comes first:

the likemindedness, leading to established rituals or the established rituals, encouraging likemindedness? Bossard and Boll go on to say that "One must be interested in his family, want to make a go of it, and think of it as a permanent relationship, to look forward to the establishment of family rituals and traditions,"⁹⁹ but I see the same unanswered question lurking here. Is it not possible that the right rituals and stories enhance and influence one's interest in one's family? If this is feasible, perhaps there is hope for the family that has not yet experienced the sharing and belonging, the "having-in-common of pleasures and pain" that is community.

A BASIS FOR COMMUNITY

The family that has experienced community can work on rituals and stories to help maintain a sense of sharing and belonging, or normative *communitas*. This family can first ask: What are the stories that we use to define our family? (What do we tell ourselves and each other about our family's past? How do we define our family now? What do we tell ourselves about the future of our family?) Do these stories that we tell encourage community or not? Are we acting in ways that complement or contradict our stories of sharing? Do our stories contradict one another? Are our rituals consistent with one another? Are we all satisfied and even pleased with our stories and activities? What could we do to make them better?

Another way of getting at the same questions would be to ask: Do we present an image of ourselves that encourages sharing with one another? Do we share common images and common meanings for those images? Do our actions within the family complement or contradict our attitudes about what family sharing is? Do we have different meanings for the shared images and actions, or have we made sure we have shared meanings? How can we relate to one another to make those images and shared activities even better?

There are a number of ways that a family might approach these questions. One way is for each member to

answer the *story* questions by him/herself, then meet with the others to share their answers. Family members could then discuss the differences and similarities in their perceptions of the family. Use of the communication skills discussed later is essential if this kind of discussion is to be successful and rewarding for all.

What about the family that does not experience a sense of personal sharing and belonging? As stated previously, one cannot force community to happen. If one cannot cause community to occur, is the family that does not regularly experience it destined to never experience it?

I have found a creative solution to this problem in Joseph Chilton Pearce's book *The Crack in the Cosmic Egg*.¹⁰⁰ Pearce discusses the "Eureka!" experience, from the child's sudden discovery to the scientist's earth-shattering find. That immediate awareness, claims Pearce, cannot be forced. It happens suddenly, often when the seeker is not at all thinking about it. Logic, planning and rational, structured thinking do not lead to the "Eureka!" experience, but they are essential prerequisites if the "Eureka!" experience is to occur. Einstein had to do a lot of very structured thinking before he came up with " $E = MC^2$ " but his formulation was not an inevitable outcome of his work. He might never have formulated it. One might look at all that careful work as necessary groundwork. Once the groundwork is laid, the "Eureka!" experience *may* happen.

Similarly, structured rites, acknowledged myths and attention to the general family process do not lead to community. One cannot force community, yet certain structures, planning, attitudes and actions are essential if the community experience is to happen.

The question then is what specifically is helpful or necessary as groundwork to encourage community?

Millar and Millar write:

"human behavior grows, in large measure, out of a set of beliefs we have about ourselves, our environment and the people we contact. What we believe colors our expectations for social interaction, influencing our perception of ourselves, our messages, the recipients of those messages and the process of message sending and receiving."¹⁰¹

A good first step then is to believe in family sharing and belonging, to see it as desirable and to believe that it can happen. Our attitudes about ourselves and about our relationships with others can result in "self-fulfilling prophecies."¹⁰² If we believe that we cannot attain true family sharing we are apt to give up before we have really started trying. Defeatism leads here to further estrangement or apathy, because that is what we expect. Our actions will encourage it. If, on the other hand, we approach the idea of family community with faith in its eventual occurrence, our behavior may reflect that optimism and therefore encourage development of community within the family.

William G. Dyer emphasizes several factors in creating better family relationships. These include trust, intentional sharing, helping, understanding, interdependence. He also discusses how to deal with feelings, motivation, discipline and feedback.¹⁰³ I feel that the family in need of community would do well to look into these and other communication concepts. Basic communication skills not only serve to open doors for greater intimacy but also help us to deal constructively with the assumptions, misunderstandings, disagreements, distrust and fear of vulnerability that so often hinder any chance for community. One of the best activities a family can engage in is the practice of active listening skills. Careful listening and the offering of feedback can clarify many otherwise misunderstood messages. The speaker who requests feedback furthers the possibility that others will comprehend the intended content and feelings. In addition to these benefits, I believe that participants in feedback techniques automatically remind themselves of the high potential for misinterpretation and actions based upon faulty assumptions.

The Gibb Categories of Defensive and Supportive Behaviors serves as a valuable guide for the family interested in developing constructive listening skills. Briefly, the categories emphasize the differences between evaluation and description, control and problem orientation, strategy and spontaneity, neutrality and empathy, superiority and equality,

certainty and provisionalism.¹⁰⁴ The supportive behaviors can encourage greater comfort, trust and more intimate self-disclosure. When the disclosing individual is affirmed and responded to with self-disclosure of equal intimacy, further trust and further self-disclosure may well occur. In these situations one's risk and vulnerability are rewarded.

Again, feedback, supportive behavior and self-disclosure do *not* lead to community, but these and other communications skills can encourage trust, openness, empathy and a general closeness that paves the way for efficient and accurate communication. Once these communication skills have been integrated into the family interaction process, values clarification can help family members explore each person's perceptions of the family plus each member's view of the success, failures, uselessness or purpose of various family activities. Discussion of each person's perspective of the family can clarify differences in perceptions and needs. Discussion of alternative rituals and redefinition of myths can culminate in collaborative efforts on the part of all to omit, modify or add family definitions and activities that will encourage deeper family intimacy and creative growth. Perpetuation of these practices and continual affirmation of the family serve to open the door for the true community experience.

Perhaps the best way to clarify the value of communication skills with regard to family community is to set

forth an example. Let us refer back to the introduction and to the account of Katie, a young woman who felt that she belonged in her family only in terms of the obedient, helpful and "loving" roles which she enacted. Katie felt that she and other family members "played games," exuding insincere cheerfulness and excessive helpfulness. She felt that she could not be honest about her feelings, for to do so would be to disclose negative, cheerless sentiments, and such attitudes contradicted the upheld family image. The few times that Katie did broach this subject with her family ended in silent cold wars which lasted for several days. During these times Katie's parents regarded her as rude, self-centered and untrustworthy. Her attempts to alter the family situation clearly failed, for her family's reaction was defensive, hostile and unconstructive in her point of view.

Let us imagine that Katie has become acquainted with some general communication techniques. She has acquired the ability both to employ and to elicit feedback responses. She has learned to distinguish between supportive and defensive response styles. She is sensitive to the differences between message and meaning and to the high incidence of faulty assumptions. She employs "I" statements, emphasizing that what she says refers to what *she* feels and how *she* perceives things. :

Katie's family may have no interest at all in acquiring comparable skills. They may, in fact, oppose the very idea of learning these techniques, either because 1) the notion that they could communicate better than they already do is highly offensive, 2) more efficient communication implies greater exposure of one's thoughts and feelings and is therefore threatening to the family calm, or 3) they view communication skills as academic nonsense, a waste of time or something reserved for psychiatrists and counselors.

If the family reacts negatively to the suggestion that they look into these skills, Katie *can* continue to employ them at home and they may rub off. My personal experience tells me that they probably will. Once family members regularly utilize these skills, factors such as trust, understanding, and self-disclosure can further develop, contributing to more open family relationships, as discussed earlier in this section.

It is when such trust, openness and honesty exist that individuals can best explore each member's perceptions of family myths and rituals, although the terms "myth" and "ritual" might never be used. Katie, for example, might regard the family as an emotionally empty shell while others may genuinely see it as "One Big Happy Family." Some family members might see a discrepancy between the image they have upheld and the activities they have engaged in, and so forth. Hopefully, the family engages in exploration of alternative

rituals and redefined myths, as discussed earlier. For example, perhaps family members grow to accept Katie's candid expression of her moods and learn to be equally open about their feelings. Perhaps family members can openly reject the "One Big Happy Family" myth and replace it with a slightly different story, such as a "One Big Caring Family" (The Seven Dwarves epitomize this twist rather well) in which moods, interests and needs vary, but sincere concern for one another prevails. If other members feel, as Katie does, that the family lacks true sharing beyond the performance of chores and the enactment of dutiful roles, perhaps they will seek activities that instill or encourage greater emotional and intellectual sharing among members. Even after all this, the acquirement of new family stories and activities does not equal community, but the potential for community has been enhanced.

Not every family can develop communication skills on its own, but there are family seminars in communication techniques. Daniel Malamud, for example, describes a workshop in which "second chance families" are formed within the group to give members a "support system for self-exploration." Family members learn to recognize their habitual communication patterns and are guided in trying alternatives. Subjective evaluations by the participants have indicated enhanced self-awareness and self-esteem, and more satisfying relationships.¹⁰⁵

Patrick Carnes and Herbert Laube describe a program of training in family communication skills in which "Trainer Families" teach such skills as listening, values clarification, problem solving and contracting to other families via role playing, modeling, practice and processing. 106

Another project which makes use of families helping families is "Multiple Family Group Therapy", in which three or more families gather together to discuss each family's problems. MFGT sessions vary in group size, cotherapists, setting, observers and policy. Participants engage in role-playing, psychodrama, and other exercises aimed at improving patient-family communication and increasing members' awareness of the interaction processes within their family. In most cases at least one member from each family has been identified as needing help of some kind.107

I see such concepts as Multiple Family Group Therapy to be potentially meaningful tools for families who do not necessarily include a member in need of special emotional, physical or social help. Families can teach each other useful communication skills and share questions, problems and solutions to many family issues, including issues of communication and community.

Howard A. Blatner emphasizes the extensive relevance of tools such as Psychodrama in his book, Practical Applications of Psychodramatic Methods. Blatner sets forth the basic elements and stages of the psychodrama process, and also suggests a variety of applications for this technique,

ranging from helping professions to elementary school teaching to industry.¹⁰⁸

I believe that psychodrama is one of many techniques which can aid family members in acquiring communication skills and in increasing awareness of family interactions.

Sculpturing is another recent and significant development. Carter Jefferson describes sculpturing as a tool to help family members to clarify perceptions of family interactions and to generate options for dealing with current interaction problems. Jefferson describes three different cases in which sculpturing was used and encourages therapists to try the family sculpture technique.¹⁰⁹

Again, I see sculpturing as a technique which has been largely confined to use in family therapy situations but which could serve as a valuable tool in any family's endeavor to highlight and work on general family communication problems. Sculpturing serves to make tangible the perceived interaction patterns of which members may be aware but which they cannot clearly verbalize or make sense of for themselves. A facilitator who can organize the sculpture exercise and serve as a model of communication should be present.

Self-Disclosure skills warrant attention in the endeavor to develop better communication and greater awareness of interaction processes. Miller, Nunnally and Wackman set forth six separate self-disclosure skills in their book, Alive and Aware¹¹⁰ These include skills in:

1)speaking for self.

2)making sense statements

specific descriptions of what one sees, hears, etc...

3)making interpretive statements

clear and concise interpretations which one acknowledges
as one's own.

4)making feeling statements

recognizing and owning one's feelings.

5)making intention statements

letting others know what one wants, short range
and long range.

6)making action statements

putting words to one's behavior in a simple, descriptive
way.

Perhaps one of the most significant contributors to the improvement of family communication is the Systems approach to families. Nathan W. Ackerman shed a light on the Systems concept when he distinguishes between Psychoanalysis and Psychotherapy.¹¹¹ Ackerman explains that psychoanalysis focuses on signs of internal disorder in an individual personality, while psychotherapy focuses on the behavior disorders of a system of interacting personalities, the family group.

Family myths affect the entire family, and family rituals involve all members to some degree. The presence or lack of community is determined by and in turn influences all

family members. The family as a unit is therefore seen as more meaningful and useful in enhancing community than is a focus upon any one individual, because no one person is responsible for all family interactions and perceptions, and no lone person can maintain a sense of community.

Virginia Satir grounds her approach to family therapy in the Systems concept, stressing both the impact of one's Self-Esteem level on the family interaction, and the development of functional and dysfunctional communication within the family system. Her books, Conjoint Family Therapy and People Making tend to set forth extreme examples of dysfunctional, low self-esteem personalities, yet both books become very relevant to all family systems once the reader accepts that we all engage in some forms of functional and dysfunctional communication, we all experience varying levels of self-esteem and most of us participate in systems of one sort or another called families.

I have raised a number of questions and ideas concerning community in the family and family use of myths and rituals. I have proposed that the family can both pave the way for community and rejuvenate the potential for community through the use of basic communication skills.

I have suggested that the contemporary American family suffers not only a lack of community but an incongruence between upheld community stories and enacted collectivity rituals. The family may intentionally not recognize that

there is a lack of community. The reasons for this are:

- 1)lack of sharing is often not tangible enough to perceive as a problem,
- 2)we are taught to equate sharing and belonging with expressions of love, fulfillment of roles and recognition of marital or blood ties,
- 3)there exists a taboo against the very idea that there may be little or no community in the family.

The family may recognize a greater need for community but feel ill prepared to do anything about it because family members do not recognize the upheld stories and activities as;

- 1)factors that strongly influence the prevailing sense of sharing and belonging, and
- 2)factors that can be altered by family members.

Vital elements in the solution of any problem are clarification of what the problem is, clarification of what needs to be altered, and clarification of the means to change the situation. Basic communication skills such as active listening facilitate the openness, trust and understanding required in successful clarification and disclosure of the individual member's perception of:

- 1)the community within one's family
- 2)the desired level of community
- 3)the current myths and rituals which influence the present level of community
- 4)preferable myths and rituals

5)ways to go about changing the myths and rituals.

The family may be no more satisfying after participating in this process, but perhaps the door will be further open to the possibility of the community event.

The nature of community, and the stories and activities which influence it have received very little space in philosophical literature and virtually no attention in studies conducted on family development and family interaction processes. While literary research and creative theorizing are vital facets in any newly explored area, structured field studies are also significant, for without such studies one must limit one's knowledge of a concept to previous developments, questionable theories and good imagination. Actual field studies are useful providers of fresh input into any field of study. Field studies can address specific questions more accurately than can an individual's imagination or reasoning skills.

I have theorized about a number of ideas throughout the paper, and many of these ideas could be tested. The following questionnaire has been designed to address the following issues regarding individuals within their families:

1)Is there a major discrepancy between one's perception of the "ideal" family and one's perception of one's own family?

2)Are there major discrepancies between the stories one tells about one's family and the activities in which one's family engages? Do the myths and rituals complement or contradict one another?

3) Are there major discrepancies between the family myths perceived by one member and those perceived by another?

The questionnaire, or one similar to it can serve one of several functions. One might employ it as part of a research project to test many of the ideas which I have set forth or to further the scholastic work done in the area of family communication. The specific questions which I have listed can be addressed regarding individual families, or one can conduct the study in such a way as to determine if we can generalize at all about the use of family rituals and myths. For example, in a given organization or neighborhood, do many people express a discrepancy between perceived "ideal" family and perceptions of their own families? Does this differ from other organizations or neighborhoods, and if so, do the common family activities and events also differ? Is there a significant relationship between high levels of discrepancy and divorce rates or incidents of runaway youths?

The questionnaire can serve an altogether different function as well. Administered in a personal and relaxed atmosphere, with several or all family members present, such a questionnaire may help individual family members clarify the above questions (and answers to these questions) for themselves. The questionnaire raises issues which persons may not have considered or may not have been able to verbalize adequately. It also raises questions about alternatives (i.e., changing how one participates in a given activity) that may not have been previously considered.

The questionnaire can be most useful when administered by someone who actively employs constructive communication skills, encouraging family members to do so as well.

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Background Information

1. How many people in your family?
2. What ages?
3. Where are you from?
4. How long have you been a family (or how long have you been married or how long have you been living together?)

Personal Family Stories versus Ideal Family Stories

I would like you to think for a moment about your family.

1. Tell about a movie, play, song, book, work of art that somehow describes your family as you see it.

Tell about the relationship between that (movie) and your family.

2. Tell about a movie, play, song, book or work of art that describes what you picture as the ideal family.

What about it makes it ideal?

3. Tell about a T.V. program that shows a group of people (or two people) that you see as similar to your own family.

What similarities do you perceive?

What differences do you perceive?

4. Tell about a T.V. program that shows a group of people (or two people) that you particularly like and that you would like to be a part of.

What about it do you like?

How would you fit yourself into that group? (as one of the existing characters? as yourself?)

How would you change the group if you were a part of it?

5. How about a T.V. program (or movie, etc...) that shows a group of people that you are glad you are not part of?

What about it do you dislike?

If you were a part of that group, what would you change to make it better?

Community/Collectivity Images in the Family

We have talked about the kinds of groups you would like to be or not be a part of. Now I would like to discuss some of the things that you see happening within the family.

6. When you think of the word "sharing" what ideas or images come to mind?

7. What do you share with one another in your family?

What would you like to share?

8. When you think of the word "belonging" what ideas or images come to mind?

9. What ideas come to mind when you think of belonging in your own family?

What is desirable about belonging in your family?

What is undesirable about belonging?

Family Ritual

10. Tell me about a few important holidays or events in your family?

How do you celebrate them? (activities, family members involved, other people involved, how much time does it take, where does it happen...)

What kinds of sharing occur?

How do you feel during these occasions?

What happens after the event? (How long do these feelings last? How do they change? How do you relate to the other participants...)

At what other times do these feelings occur?

11. Are there holidays or events that you would like to celebrate differently?

How would you change them?

How do you think you would feel during these events after you had changed them?

12. Are there occasions that you do not participate in or celebrate now that you would like to?

What are they?

How would you celebrate them?

How would you hope to feel during these events?

13. What about events that you do celebrate now that you would just as soon not participate in at all?

14. What activities do all (or both) of you engage in together? (trips, games, meals, parties, conversations, church, temple, quiet evenings, cooking, walks, sports, etc...)

How often do you do these activities?

How do you feel about the other participants during these activities?

15. Are there any activities that you would like all (or both) to engage in together, but don't at present?

What kinds of activities?

How often?

With whom?

How would you hope to feel as a result of doing these activities together?

16. Are there any activities that you would just as soon omit? or not do with others?

17. Any questions that you would like to go over again?

18. Anything that you would like to add?

CONCLUSION

We look increasingly to the nuclear family to provide us with a sense of community, a kind of sharing and belonging that goes beyond role, structure and the fulfillment of material needs. Individuals often seek out community. All families employ myths to define themselves, provide guidelines for attitudes and behavior, and give meaning to family relationships. Similarly, all families participate in rituals to emphasize certain attitudes, beliefs and structures, and to enhance family definitions and guidelines.

Many families do not provide the community needed by individual family members. This failure results at least partially from our inability to describe community, its abstract nature, our ignorance of the significance of myths and rituals in our daily lives, and the potential for myths and rituals to contradict one another, particularly for collectivity rituals to clash with community myths. An individual may tell him or herself that the family offers much opportunity for sharing and belonging, yet feel that it does not, having no guidelines to clarify what is missing and what one can do to change it.

I have attempted in this paper to clarify what community is and how myth and ritual influence it. I have discussed some general views of the family, set forth several approaches to community, and discussed myths and rituals as blockades and contributors to the community experience.

I have explored communication skills as an essential first step toward laying the groundwork for the possibility of community, emphasizing that community cannot be forced but its likelihood can be increased. I have also discussed some implications of these ideas, such as the use of a questionnaire to facilitate community within the family.

In studying interpersonal relationships, be they within the family or elsewhere, we can do well to look not only to current communication trends and research projects but to less pragmatic areas of study as well. The study of community has been left largely to the philosopher and theologians, while the student of religious studies has monopolized the literature on myth and ritual. These concepts are not "dead" nor do they refer only to antiquated or "primitive" ideals. Myth, ritual and the need for community have proven to be integral facets of our daily lives, regardless of whether or not we acknowledge them as such, and whether or not we use these terms to describe them. To neglect these concepts is to overlook factors which have strong impact upon us and which we can alter to improve our relationships. To recognize them is to acknowledge valuable vehicles for interpersonal growth. The choice is ours.

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